

Pastor's Column

In the Midst of Suffering

Do you have glasses? Have a broken ankle? Is there cancer in your body and the thought of it twists your guts?

I believe God can mend all of that. Blindness, breaks, mutated cells, you name it: God has the cure.

It's also true that God loves us. Yes, he sent his son to die for us, and that is quite the grand gesture, but saying it over and again sometimes makes us forget its impact. I'll choose a smaller gesture. God loves us more than we love each other. Do you have a brother or sister? A best friend? Have you ever been grieved by something—lost your bike, parent died, kid's gone off to college and the house feels empty, coffee maker broke—and your friend is willing to listen to your problems? They sit beside you and hold your hand, wrinkle their nose and wince with you, tell a joke, take you out to Starbucks and let a latte clear your mind? God loves you like that, but more. Have you ever had someone hug you when you scraped your knee, kissed the boo-boo, rubbed the pain away? God loves you like that, but more. Have you seen a child playing by the street, and then one of those small, red Toyotas barrels by and cuts the corner? How do you react? Do you race towards danger rather than away from it—to pull the kid away from the screeching tires and horn, even if you might get hit in the process?

God loves you that much, but even more. We're back to Jesus, willing to die on the cross to save us. Don't let that love lose its impact.

Now, let's move back to the cure. Why doesn't God always rub our pain away? I know he can. He healed a blind man. A woman with internal bleeding touched Jesus' coat, and boom—she's healed. Yet we have glasses, we have breaks, we have bleeding, we have cancer. If God loves us and could heal us, then why do we hurt?

Perhaps the answer is that he loves us. That seems counterintuitive, but bear with me. It could be love like when a parent denies a child too many sweets. All those empty calories will spoil the appetite, make nutritious food less appreciated, and could also cause obesity and health problems when eaten without moderation. Love is willing to deny in order to protect those loved.

Or maybe it's not like that.

Maybe it's love like buying someone a book, but waiting to give it to them until their birthday. There's a special time when the gift will have special impact. Love is patient, after all.

I feel these examples pale when faced with such decisions as healing, so let me use a biblical example to clarify my point. Take



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the man born blind in the gospel of John. The disciples asked whether it was his or his parents' sin that caused his problem, focused on what's wrong with the man. In contrast, Jesus told them that it was "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:1-3 [NIV]). Immediately afterwards, Jesus healed the man. God's marvelous work displayed.

That's good.

Still, the man was blind all his life. There was a problem that could be healed, but he had to endure it for years. Yes, God loves that man. Perhaps that's why the man had to endure. If God had healed the man when he was born, he might not have felt the need to follow Jesus. Did his blindness draw him closer to God? Our infirmities are sometimes our greatest push to lean into him. They can teach us to trust him when it feels like everything is caving in around us. He's not holding our illnesses over our heads, saying, "If you'll just trust me, everything will be better." He's saying, "Trust me. I have a plan. With me, you're stronger than the pain." Perhaps love denied instant healing in order to offer a better gift: a strong relationship with the creator of the universe.

There might be another reason why the blind man had to wait. God loves him, but he loves all of us, too. Could the blind man have endured for our sake? There was a time and place for healing, one that would be remembered for millennia to come. If the healing had happened at birth, if the man had never been blind—would we remember him? Would we be able to look to that moment and see the power of God at work? Or would the man have been forgotten? The opportunity for testimony would have been lost, and we wouldn't have had that moment to cite when talking about God's healing power at work in the world. Maybe that's why Jesus was in the tomb for three days. He could have been letting it sink in, letting people realize he was well and truly dead—before revealing that he is stronger than anything, even death.

He died for us. Now he lives. The truth of those statements impact us even now. If he did put off rising from the dead, then I believe it was because he knew that the effect would be worth it. His love is patient with perfect timing.

When God heals people, it's a testimony to our faith and a witness to the power of God. At the same time, people who trust in God through their suffering are a testimony to his love and power as well. For example, my mother is a diabetic. The disease is a difficult thing to control. She needs to have vigilance in watching her blood sugar, since letting it fall or rise too far could kill her. She has to stick herself with needles at least once a day. She must always be careful wherever she sets her feet, because stepping on something as insignificant as a staple could cause her to lose her leg.

Mom has lived with diabetes for years. But more than that, she's thrived with it. She's a joyous woman who goes about with a smile and a laugh. She's been a witness to so many people through her patient perseverance, and she praises God every day for giving her the strength to keep on living. No, she doesn't want to be ill. She'd gladly take an instant cure. But I believe God knows that Mom is like that blind man. There's a perfect time and place for her healing. Until that day comes, she's a fruitful and faithful witness, accepting the greater gift of trusting in God even through the suffering. People can look to her as an example of God's strength and grace, just like people can look in John's gospel for God's healing. Mom has met so many people who've asked her for help with this disease, and she has pointed them to a way to thrive. She's pointed them to God. In a way, her diabetes is a blessing.

There are instances when God reaches down and miraculously heals the blind eyes. I should know—I used to need glasses, but at a prayer conference a decade ago, someone approached me and said God wanted my eyes healed. I shrugged and said she could pray for me if she truly believed that. She did. I've never needed glasses since. Thank you, Lord.

That said, I have jaw pain, tinnitus, dandruff, allodoxaphobia... Let's just say there's a lot more healing God could do. But I trust him to do it in his time.

Until then, I aim to be as good a witness to his love as my mother is. Lord willing, people will see that his glory permeates even in the midst of suffering.

I know he'll be with me each step of the way.

Boyd I

Boyd Kermit Si Sr., 89, of Homestead, Florida, formerly Salisbury, NC, passed away Tuesday, February 12, 2019, at Sun Assisted Living.

Boyd was born September 12, 1929, in Salisbury to the late William Spencer and Minnie Proctor Si. He was a graduate of Spencer High School, a veteran of the Korean War, serving in the 1st Battalion. Boyd was a member of Messiah Southern Bell in service.

Surviving Boyd are Simerson; two sons, Homestead, FL, and of St. Charles, IL, and wife Kristin, Brent Simerson and Simerson; and grand Simerson and Simerson. In addition to his by brothers, Cecil, sisters, Nadine K. Watkins Lee and

In lieu of flowers, Messiah Lutheran Salisbury, NC 28381, Caballero River Homestead, FL, is

Fashi in

The women of Homestead hold their annual fashion show at 7 pm in the Parish Hall, Homestead. The show features the "Roaring 20's" and is dressed to the theme.

This year's fashion show is Fashions of Homestead. Once again, a famous strawberry

Tickets are available at the office of John P. For more information, call

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Instead of taking goals, there are so many can be embraced, healthier you.

When too many and friends become needed, spending comfort of your bay.

Though it might breakfast is delicious options that you egg muffins or nutrients, like the your body moving

Remaining with physical effects a five-minute lap or so. Not only can also make you